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ADITI MUKHERJI¹ AND ALAMGIR CHOWDHURY

¹International Water Management Institute (IWMI), India

a.mukherji@cgiar.org

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Key Message

Based on an exploratory field work in polders and sub-projects managed by Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) we emphasize the role that internal organizational culture of implementing agency plays in fostering successful community management of polders in Bangladesh. The key message is that for a successful community management of coastal polders, it is not enough to organize and train communities, but it is also necessary to bring about an organizational change in implementing agencies themselves.

Summary

Inundation and severe flooding in the coastal areas is a frequent occurrence in Bangladesh. This leads to loss of life and property as well as severe negative impacts on livelihoods. The government of Bangladesh has been investing steadily in coastal zone management through construction and rehabilitation of polders. The challenges facing the polder communities are complex and similar to those faced by many communities in which water is used for multiple purposes. But unlike other multiple use systems (such as canals and tanks) where there is rarely ever a commonality in interest, in the case of polder communities the fear that these polders may breach during a natural calamity and cause damage to life and property makes it easier to bring about a modicum of community action. Principles of community management of coastal polders are now enshrined in the Water Policy of Bangladesh. All

donor funded projects include a large component of creation and training of user groups for management of polders. User groups are subjected to rigorous training during the course of the project, but more often than not, remnants of community management become hard to trace as soon as the donor program ends. Why is that?

Based on brief exploratory field work in polders and sub-projects managed by BWDB and LGED, it is our operating hypothesis that while a lot of attention is paid to capacity building of the communities, not enough attention is paid to the government agency and farmers relationship and to the organization culture of the government agency itself. It is assumed that just because principles of community management are enshrined in the Water Policy, the government agency in charge of the polder embraces it and does the required organizational changes needed for implementing this policy in a meaningful way. This assumption is often misplaced and government agencies only do the motions of endorsing community management without internalizing it within their organizational culture. Therefore, it is not only imperative to train communities: it is equally, if not more, important to bring about an organizational change in implementing agencies.